

October Gardening Calendar

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The leaves are falling! Some gardeners might think it's time to put away their gardening tools, but autumn is a busy time in Pacific Northwest gardens.

Flowers: Pull up annuals; compost if no disease is present. Rake and discard leaves and other debris from under roses to reduce diseases. To protect your roses from cold, pile 6 inches of mulch over the bud union (the swollen area on the stem just above the roots) after a couple of freezes. To save non-hardy fuchsias and geraniums, cut them back to 6 inches and store them in a cool, dark, protected place until spring; water them lightly once a month. Dig up and dry tubers of cannas, elephant ears and tuberous begonias and store them in sawdust, peat or newspaper in a cool dark place. Dig dahlia tubers and gladiolus corms and store them, or leave them in the ground except at higher elevations. Do not prune ornamental grasses. Leave them for display and prune in February. Divide and plant new perennials. Plant sweet pea seeds. Scatter seeds of forget-me-nots, calendula, poppies, larkspur and annual alyssum for early spring bloom. Plant ornamental kale and chard for winter color.

Bulbs: Plant spring bulbs. Deep planting makes bulbs less susceptible to cold and rodent damage and encourages large flowers. Plant winter-blooming cyclamens now. Plant tulips when the soil has cooled.

Tree and shrubs: Plant new purchases now; transplant deciduous trees and shrubs after their leaves have fallen. Add mulch around new plantings to retain moisture and to provide nutrients as the mulch decomposes. Water existing plantings as needed; do not fertilize or prune them. Leave small leaves where they fall and shred large ones to make leaf mulch for your garden beds. Consider placing protective collars around the base of young trees to prevent rodent damage during the winter.

Fruit trees and berries: Clean up fallen fruit, leaves and other debris in the orchard to prevent the spread of disease. Prune out second-year canes on raspberries and blackberries and remove with other debris. Except at higher elevations, train first-year blackberry canes to a supporting trellis. Apply a layer of mulch to strawberries to protect them during winter.

Veggies: Clean up beds and consider planting a cover crop for the winter. Plant garlic, using the biggest cloves from your summer harvest. Store mature squashes for winter consumption in a dry, well-ventilated area with temperatures maintained around 50 degrees. Do not store them on concrete floors, near apples or touching each other.

Lawn: Thatch, aerate and install sod. Top dress lawn with a light layer of sifted compost. Overseed thin areas by the middle of the month. Apply lime if indicated by a soil test.

Houseplants: To entice blooms at Christmas, move your Christmas cactus to a cool room, stop fertilizing it and decrease watering. Provide at least 13 hours of darkness each day until buds appear. Move your amaryllis to a cool, dark place. Do not water it. After 6-8 weeks, cut back the withered leaves and start watering it again.

Autumn can be an extraordinary time as leaves, flowers and berries take on vibrant hues. As you perform your October gardening tasks, be sure to enjoy the beauty that is all around.